



# William the Conqueror

**WHY HE MADE HISTORY** *William the Conqueror became one of the greatest kings of England. His conquests greatly affected the history of both England and Western Europe.*

*As you read this biography, think about how William's cleverness and leadership helped him conquer England.*

In 1035 William I, also known as William the Conqueror, became the Duke of Normandy in France after his father died. William was still a child and there were many disloyal nobles who tried to replace him. It was a dangerous time for the young duke. On at least one occasion he was almost killed. His mother managed to protect him during his childhood. Later, with the help of the king of France, he overpowered the disloyal nobles and redistributed their lands among his friends.

William's cousin was King Edward, also known as Edward the Confessor, of England. It is believed that Edward, who had no children, had promised William that he would **succeed** him to the throne. However when Edward died, Edward's brother-in-law Harold became king instead. When William heard this, he secured support from the pope, organized an army, and sailed off from Normandy to attack England. William managed to defeat and kill Harold at the Battle of Hastings. William became king on Christmas day of 1066.

Many nobles did not want William as king and he was constantly putting down revolts during his first years as ruler. These revolts eventually made him dislike his new kingdom.

William spent most of his time in Normandy and went to England only when it was necessary. Nevertheless, William established many reforms. He reformed the church by replacing many English bishops with foreign bishops and by becoming involved in the administration of the church. He created separate **ecclesiastical** courts. Land was taken from disloyal subjects and was redistributed to others who were loyal to William. He established the feudal system in England.

One of William's most notable contributions was to order a general **census** of England. The results are recorded in the two-volume *Domesday Book*. This work details the economic resources of the English population during the twelfth century.

Throughout his reign, William continued to wage military campaigns to stop revolts and invasions. He invaded Scotland and Wales to secure England's frontiers. In 1087 he died from injuries he received while fighting against the French. On his deathbed, he divided his kingdom between his half brother Robert and his loyal son William Rufus.

*Answer the following questions in your composition book:*

1. **Explain:** What actions did William take when he found out that Harold became king of England?
2. **Analyze and Make Judgments:** How did William deal with the rebellious nobles? Did this help him keep the throne? Explain your answer.
3. **Extra Challenge:** Imagine that you are a noble living in England under the reign of William the Conqueror. Think about what life would be like during the era. Write down a detailed account of your actions on a busy day.